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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Discussion paper contributed by the farmers and small forest landowners major group**

Summary

The farmers and small forest landowners major group is bringing the knowledge and know-how of family forest owners and community forest owners from around the globe to the international forest policy discussion.

There is an increasing recognition among policy and decision makers that property rights and secure land tenure are the first step towards sustainable resource use.

Family forest owners and community forest owners have a genuine interest in a balanced approach to sustainable forest management, knowing that the generation to follow will also depend on goods and services from their forests. The responsibility to maintain the forest on a long-term basis is firmly rooted. The bond between rural populations, forest and forest management in its many forms is something very special.

Generation-bridging experiences in the management of natural resources has enabled family forest owners and community forest owners to acquire a wealth of practical knowledge and know-how that has not yet received adequate recognition from policy or decision makers. Through their day-to-day work with the forests, family forest owners and community forest owners are in a unique position to learn continuously and understand the complex dynamics of forest management.

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** Prepared jointly by the Global Alliance of Community Forestry and the Confederation of European Forest Owners.

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I. Introduction

1. Since 2002, the farmers and small forest landowners major group has been actively involved in the international forest policy debate. It submitted discussion papers compiling priority areas for action and proposed achievable goals and targets to the second, third, fourth and fifth sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests. In preparation for the seventh session of the Forum on Forests the major group, with inputs from the Confederation of European Forest Owners, the International Family Forestry Alliance and the Global Alliance of Community Forestry, would like to re-emphasize the crucial role of secure property and land tenure rights and the commitment of family forest owners and community forest owners to sustainable forest management and to the implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and the four global objectives agreed by the Economic and Social Council in 2006.

II. Priority areas for action

A. Forestry and land tenure

2. Sustainability is, by definition, a long-term question and sustainable forest management can be achieved only by a long-term approach to forest management. A long-term commitment to forests is a precondition for such sustainable management. The ownership structure is a vital part of ensuring that commitment.

3. A key factor in sustainable forest management is secure, stable and long-term property rights or long-term tenure rights. That leads to management for the future and a strong attachment to forestry, which also benefit local communities. In the case of community forestry, secure property rights give incentives to communities to plan long-term management, protect their lands from illegal logging, monitor forest fires and make sustainable use of forest products important for their livelihoods. The way to sustainable management is to support the people who live near to and in forests.

4. As forest owners, we have learned that the same commitment to forests exists in other forms of forest tenure, where there are possibilities for a lasting responsibility and commitment to the forest and to forest management. Community forestry, in different forms, leads to management based on values similar to those in family forestry with individual ownership. Communities living close to forests and in conditions of poverty should have ample opportunities to exercise their management and use rights to forest resources and to share the responsibility to contribute to the well-being of their families and communities and to environmental conservation.

5. While it appears that a shift towards the privatization of forest ownership/tenure will continue, there is insufficient data at present to forecast the magnitude of that shift. Some scenarios suggest that in a few decades as much as one third to one half of global forests might be private property or subject to private tenure.

6. At the same time, that shift in forest ownership and tenure presents a challenge for forest policy at both the national and international levels. Lessons learned indicate that irrespective of the ownership structure or model, ownership rights must be clear and secure, with clearly defined rights and responsibilities and documented duration of tenure and legal and institutional mechanisms for enforcement and dispute resolution. Transparency and accountability are essential to the process of gaining or transforming ownership and tenure rights.

7. The best way to secure ownership and tenure rights is to create stable political and economic conditions. That means also supporting the creation and development of effective forest owners' organizations or organizations of community forestry. There is evidence of a close connection between sustainable forestry and strong forest owners' organizations.

8. Strong organizations representing the political interests of forest owners will most effectively function with the economic cooperation of forest owners and the collaboration of forest cooperatives. The forest owners are the owners and controlling forces in independent democratic cooperatives.

9. Cooperatives of forest owners will also provide an effective tool for managing forests in areas of dispersed ownership structures and small properties. Cooperatives can also provide services and counselling to assist owners in achieving knowledge-based management.

B. Forestry and poverty alleviation

10. Policy and decision makers need to recognize the important link between forestry and poverty alleviation. The world's rural poor are in many ways dependent on forests and forestry. Access to forest resources needs to be complemented by well-functioning markets to ensure that the rural poor are able to derive income from forests.

11. Another key element includes changing decision makers' perceptions and preconceived ideas that poor people are responsible for forest resource degradation and deforestation. Deforestation's causes are multiple and involve many actors, as well as the economic forces of supply and demand. Many experiences around the world have demonstrated that in regions where communities were involved in the management or co-management of forests or natural protected areas, forests were better conserved. However, that is only possible when communities are able to satisfy their basic needs for food, housing and health. Making forests productive, with adequate and sustainable planning, will ensure their conservation in the long term.

12. Another consideration to take into account is that in many developing countries with large areas of forest, such as in Central America, the Amazon, the Congo Basin and South Asia, Governments usually do not have enough resources to protect their natural capital. Countries such as Nepal, that choose to hand over their forests to communities, have succeeded in recovering large amounts of forests at the same time as securing the basic needs of forest-dependent populations.

C. Forestry and climate change

13. Climate change is a fact. The role of forests and forestry in addressing the global challenge is characterized by ambiguity.

14. So far, most policy discussions have focussed on the role of forests in combating climate change due to their ability to capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Less attention is paid to the adaptation of forest ecosystems to climate change. Research in Europe indicates that an average temperature increase of 2° C leads, under European conditions, to a shift of forest ecosystems of 400 km to the east and 400 km to the north. Consequently, the current pattern of forest ecosystems will change dramatically, with severe impacts on economic, social and environmental sustainability.

15. Policy and decision makers are challenged to urgently reach a new international agreement on stronger emission caps for industrialized countries, incentives for developing countries to limit their emissions and support for robust adaptation measures.

III. Assessment of the United Nations Forum on Forests process

16. From its initial participation in the United Nations Forum on Forests process, the small forest landowners major group has repeatedly pointed to the important link between secure property rights and land tenure and sustainable forest management. During the early sessions of the Forum on Forests, there was hardly any recognition or awareness of small-scale private forest ownership or community ownership. There has been a positive change, demonstrated by, for example, the recent Forum e-discussion on forest ownership. A background study commissioned by the Forum secretariat, which is expected to be ready for the seventh session of the Forum, intends to elaborate on the link between forest ownership and governance. It is important to recognize that many countries have initiated the process of transferring titles and tenure rights for some Government-owned forest areas to local communities, indigenous groups and private households. In developing countries, that transition has been due to, among other things, recognition by Governments of the legal rights of indigenous communities to forest resources and an increased awareness that local ownership may result in more effective protection, efficient use of resources, improved livelihoods and the provision of incentives for long-term investments in sustainable forest management. Similar shifts in countries with economies in transition have resulted in a major increase in private ownership in Europe.

IV. Recommendations for a non-legally binding instrument on forests

17. The diversity of the world's forests calls for a flexible and dynamic approach in the design of the non-legally binding instrument. The farmers and small forest landowners major group is supporting a non-legally binding instrument that would provide a general policy framework, allowing regional forest policy processes to contribute in the best possible way to the global forest policy dialogue. An important element will be the inclusion of major groups, as equal partners, in the

formulation of the non-legally binding instrument and its subsequent implementation. Since the initiation of a multi-stakeholder dialogue in 2002, the major groups have made an ongoing effort to build trust and partnerships with makers of policy and decisions.

18. Major groups have a rich experience on the ground that should be used by makers of policy and decisions in designing the political framework. The regional and local networks represented by major groups are well suited to communicating and translating global forest policy deliberations on the ground, and thus assisting in addressing priorities for action.

19. So far, global forest policy discussions have neglected the impact of capacity-building and knowledge transfer on the implementation of sustainable forest management. Therefore, the non-legally binding instrument should have a special focus on capacity-building, education and training, at the local and regional levels.

V. Recommendations for the multi-year programme of work

20. A strengthened regional component in the United Nations Forum on Forests process from the present until 2015 would offer a unique opportunity to highlight regional priorities while continuously addressing global priorities. The main global priorities for action are outlined in section III above. Regional priorities can follow the ongoing discussion in regional forest policy processes. For example, the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe chose "Forests and water" and "Forests, wood and energy" as its two main thematic areas for the upcoming fifth Ministerial Conference, in November 2007.

21. To date, the major groups have had a passive role in the implementation of the multi-year programme of work. It might be worthwhile to integrate their knowledge and know-how more actively in the development and implementation of the programme. One approach could be to have specific thematic sessions co-organized by major groups to directly link policy formulation to implementation on the ground. That could be one way to effectively integrate the rich experience of major groups in the implementation of sustainable forest management in the design and implementation of the programme.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

22. Makers of policy and decisions in the global forest policy dialogue need to realize that a partnership approach towards major groups offers a unique asset for the sound implementation of long-term strategies for sustainable forest management.

23. The small forest landowners major group is committed to putting the knowledge and know-how in the field of sustainable forest management of their regional and local networks at the disposal of the United Nations Forum on Forests process. In return, Member States and intergovernmental organizations are requested to focus on the most pressing issues, as outlined in section III, to drive positive change for the sustainable development of the world's forests.